

University of Vermont
Sociology Department
Soc 296
Spring 2006

Professor Robbie Pfeufer Kahn
Benedict 001
656-2187/robbie.kahn@uvm.edu
Hours: Tues & Thurs 12-1:15pm
and by appointment

Animals and Society

Course Description

Is the cuddly puppy who sits on your lap a monster of dependence created by forced domestication or did her ancestors choose domestication? Should cows be liberated from farms or should we continue to use them for meat, milk, and leather but care for them compassionately? Should animals have legal rights or can we do whatever we want with them because they have no consciousness of past and future? Are people who live with companion animals neurotic or are they perfectly well-adjusted? Are humans superior to other species, as Western tradition maintains, or do we co-exist interdependently?

These are a few of the many questions that arise from the changing relationship between humans and animals, which began in the late twentieth century and extends into the twenty-first. Many factors account for challenges to the clear boundary between humans and animals characteristic of Western culture. They include the findings of archaeology about the early domestication of animals, of ethology (the study of animals, particularly in their natural environments), and of medicine that animals can be beneficial to your health. Other factors which cause us to rethink the animal/human relationship include the ecological crisis, which forces humans to realize that we, too, are mammals at risk from environmental degradation, the changing patterns of family and community which give companion animals new importance. Also, the importance of service animals in human society as they aid people with disabilities, assist in the army, and in law enforcement agencies, ecological and ethical arguments for vegetarianism, the growing lack of confidence, due to environmental threats brought on by human mismanagement of the earth's resources, that we are a species superior to others.

These and other historical, cultural, and social developments have provoked scholarly disciplines as diverse as sociology, philosophy, history, literature, geography, psychology, and zoology to turn their attention to the subject of human/ animal relations. As an index of interest, Harvard Law School offered a course in animal rights for the first time last fall, the American Sociological Association has given provisional approval of a subsection entitled Animals and Society, and several scholarly journals, such as *Society and Animals* and *Anthrozoos* have come into existence.

This rich, new area of scholarly investigation is the subject of our course. But we also come together as readers of the printed page. Reading might seem less than exciting to young women and men accustomed to the visual acquisition of knowledge--TV, movies, computers--over the verbal. Yet the gray blocks of words on white paper in our five texts hold as much life in them as a wiggly puppy. Together, we will work on releasing the boundless energy contained in a text. The key is to look deeply at the words that create the author's story. Our weekly written exercises and discussions will help you cultivate the ability to look deeply at the text.

During the semester we will see a number of films and have several guest speakers.

University of Vermont/Classroom Conduct

Students enrolled in Arts and Sciences are expected to follow the following guidelines for behavior in class:

1/Students are expected to attend and be prepared for all regularly scheduled classes.

2/Students are expected to arrive on time and stay in class until the class period ends. If a student knows in advance that she or he will need to leave early, the faculty member should be notified before the class period begins.

3/Students are expected to treat faculty and fellow students with respect. For example, students must not disrupt the class by ostentatiously not paying attention or by leaving and reentering the classroom during the class period. Actions which distract the class from the work at hand are not acceptable. *Thus it is of the utmost importance that cell phones be turned off.* It is expected that students will pay respectful attention to comments made by the lecturer and by fellow students.

Behavior that departs from these guidelines is not acceptable and may be cause for disciplinary action.

Course Requirements

Attendance You are expected to attend *all* classes. I will be taking attendance. If you miss more than one week of classes, your grade will be reduced. For example an A- would become a B+. For each additional week missed, the grade will continue to drop.

Class participation You are expected to contribute to class discussion by having read and thought about the week's readings. Some weeks the readings will be easier, which will give you time to work on your end of term paper. But in other weeks, the readings may be more difficult. I do not believe in forcing people to speak by putting a question to them but each of you should come prepared to offer a question or comment each week based upon the readings. Hence, in your oral questions or comments, I only expect evidence of your having thought deeply about the material; I do not expect polished responses.

Oral Presentations Each Thursday, one or two of you will be responsible for leading the discussion about the chapters we will have read for that week. Presenters will be asked to write a five-page response paper as the basis of their presentation. The paper should include three questions for class consideration. The questions must be about a specific word the author uses and how and why it contributes to her/his discussion. I have put on reserve in the library a set of papers by former students which can give you a sense of how to look with mindful appreciation on how and why an author uses the words she does (see below for a detailed discussion of looking deeply at how an author writes).

Response papers Each week, you will be expected to write a one to two page response paper to the readings. I would like the paper *typed*. Pick a word that arouses an emotion in you. It may puzzle, delight, annoy, or even anger you. It may illuminate something for you. The response paper should begin from a specific word *embedded in a quote* that you set down at the top of the page.

First, note the publication date of the book that is found on the copyright page. The date will help you put the book in historical context. For instance, if

the author uses the word "mankind," and he wrote in the 1700s or even in the 1950s, you would know that he did so unaware that the word really refers to men, not to men and women. Public consciousness of the gendered nature of language did not arise until the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s and '70s.

Second, create a word cluster of associations that *you* have over the meanings of the word. If you wish, you may go on to discuss the relevance of the word to your own life. This exercise tends to make visible to you why the word you chose attracted you to itself.

Third, look the word up in a *recent* dictionary (check the date on the copyright page), and write down the definition in your paper. Dictionary definitions are very informative because they offer a public consensus on the meaning of a word. *Also*, note down the word roots--Latin, Greek, Old English or French or German; clues to the meaning of a word can be found in its roots.

Fourth, you want to consider how the word comes to life *in the context of the quote* you have presented at the top of the page. How do the surrounding words enrich your word? How does your word contribute to the author's discussion overall?

The one-page response papers are rehearsals for the presentation papers, and for the term paper (a description of mindful appreciations appears below). I will collect response papers each week and return them the next week.

Term paper For the term paper, you are expected to write a *ten to twelve-page* mindful appreciation of texts which discuss a subject raised in our course. Your texts can be transdisciplinary.

Reference specialist at Bailey Howe Library, Martha Day, will help the class learn how to use data bases for *scholarly* research effectively. A good place to begin your research is in the bibliographies found in our books and the subject headings found on the copyright page, which can help you do key word searches for material related to subjects of the book. Your subject search should yield eight sources for a provisional bibliography that you will hand in about one month after classes begin.

Four weeks after turning in the subject search, I will expect you to select four sources, create an *annotated* bibliography (you can do this by skimming the texts you've chosen), and hand it in to me. I would like you to use *one* of the

readings in the course for your paper. I expect you to work with *four* authors altogether. You may choose three books or articles from scholarly journals, or a chapter from an edited volume of scholarly essays, or a combination of all three.

Crucial to our exchange as teacher and student is your providing me with a *draft of your paper*. By commenting on your paper in a formative stage of it, I can help you with the enterprise of writing. For me, the transaction over your writing is the most significant contribution I can make to what you get from the course.

For how to do citations properly, consult *The Writer's Pocket Handbook* (see below for a detailed discussion of mindful appreciation or deep looking.)

I have put on reserve in the library some examples of drafts and final papers so you can see the kind of mindful appreciation I am looking for in your work.

With the idea of a draft in mind, and of the delay time when ordering books or articles through interlibrary loan, I propose the following schedule: *Subject search*: Thurs, Feb 9; *Annotated bibliography*: Thurs, Mar 2; *Rough draft*: Thurs, April 6.

Grading policy The final grade will be awarded as follows: Response papers 20%; participation in class discussions 10%; presentations and five page paper 30%; 10-12 page term paper 40%.

Mindful Appreciation: Looking Deeply at a Text

Most of the knowledge we acquire is not direct: It is mediated or filtered, through the lens of a writer, film-maker, artist, or acquaintance. The purpose of a mindful appreciation is to study the lens through which the seer sees. That is, to say all persons who transmit knowledge are story-tellers--even if the story is a scientific, sociological or historical account--and the story they tell is shaped by the lens through which they look at the world. This lens does not provide a transparent reflection of what they see--like looking out a window (although window panes have their peculiarities also); rather, the lens of the seer is ground, just like an eye glass, by the person's situatedness with respect to such things as race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, physical ability, age, historical,

national, and cultural context as well as his/her professional training and irreducible individuality.

Besides the lens metaphor, we can consider a quilt. A colonial woman has crafted a beautiful quilt; when you stand back from it (it is hanging on the wall in a museum) you see a complex, alluring pattern of flowers. How did the woman achieve this optical illusion? To study her craft you have to come up close and study the individual bits of cloth that make up the flower. When we study a word, we are coming up close and looking at the individual elements that build the author's quilt of words.

A third way of thinking about a mindful appreciation is that the *knowledge* we receive via an author is filtered through her or his *consciousness*. Imagine that as you read a text you enter the very mind and body of the author and look out at the world through her or his eyes. Your job in doing a mindful appreciation is experience the writer's consciousness at work. This best can be done not by revealing biographical details of the author's life (though this can be relevant) or by summarizing the author's discussion, as in a book report, or by writing a heated reaction paper (though a mindful appreciation can be written from the heart). (In the final paper any heated reactions can appear in small type in a *footnote*.) The approach that works most successfully is to study the *language the writer uses* in constructing a discussion, for the way we see what the writer is looking at is through the words she or he uses: indeed, the words *are* the lens or the pieces of cloth that make up the quilt.

Some strategies for presenting a mindful appreciation are:

1/Select a word *in the context of a quote* and then develop a word cluster of your own associations to it, and record these in your paper (in the final paper the word cluster would go in a *footnote* in small type).

2/Next, look the word up in a recent dictionary (including the word roots), and record the dictionary definition in you paper (in the final paper the dictionary definition would go in a *footnote* in small type).

3/Then, look closely at the word *as used by the author* to build her/his discussion. The best way to look deeply at the word is in the context of the quote where it appears. The context is crucial to its meaning; a word may have one set of connotations in one place in the text, and other connotations elsewhere. *Be sure to include in your paper the sentence from the text where the word appears.* How the word comes to life *in the context of the quote* you have presented at the top of

the page. How do the surrounding words enrich your word? How does your word contribute to the author's discussion overall? The idea, as one former student put it, is to "go from small to large."

You may include other quotes from the text in your paper, with the same word or with other words, but additional quotes cannot stand on their own: like your first quote, they must be interpreted by you with close attention to the language used.

4/ Any conceptual assertions you make (i.e. "animals chose domestication") must be supported with examples--quotations--from the text.

5/ Ask questions of *how* and *why* the author constructs the discussion as s/he does (if your appreciation mostly answers the question of *what* did the author say, this is a book report not a mindful appreciation).

6/ Are there any contradictions in the author's discussion that you notice, or complexities? (These fault lines may yield the most telling insights into the author's work.)

These are the kinds of approaches and questions you should use in all of the three writing exercises we do in the seminar--writing response papers, giving presentations, writing your paper for the presentation, and researching and writing your final paper.

With regard to the final paper, you will need to compare the lenses of the different writers you choose and ask what bearing these differences or similarities have on our understandings of all four texts. You want to ask such questions as: How and why do the authors' lenses differ, as revealed through their language?

Another crucial thing to discipline yourself about in presentations, response papers, and the final paper is to make sure that whenever you use an abstract term, you *define* it. Words such as social constructionism, essentialism, modernity, anthropomorphism--to take a few examples--need defining, either as how the authors use them or what you mean by them in using such terms.

Lastly, I will not accept final papers, even in draft form, with incorrect punctuation and grammar. Use your response and presentation papers to practice these writing skills. Citations and footnotes in sociology papers follow the rules of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, which can be found in *The Writer's Pocket*

Handbook. Other rules of grammar and punctuation are common to all disciplines and can be found in the handbook.

Remember, my office hours are *Tuesday and Thursday 12:00-1:15pm* or by appointment. I am happy to help you with the business of writing and presenting in the mindful appreciation mode. *Each of you should plan to see me at least once before turning in a draft of your paper*. Also reference specialist, Martha Day, has helped seminar students greatly in the past and should be consulted if you need help. Her advice--"don't figure out a topic in your room; go to the library and interact with the books and data bases"--is most excellent.

Additional Writing Help The Writing Center at UVM offers valuable help to students. Please contact Sue Dinitz, Director, at 656-7963 or sdinitz@zoo.uvm.edu for help with your writing. Don't wait until the day before your paper is due; some students seek help from The Writing Center on a weekly basis.

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*As I said earlier I have put on reserve examples of response papers as well as drafts and final papers based on the drafts from a previous semester for you to get an idea of the kind of mindful appreciation I am looking for in your work.*

### Required Readings

S. Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994) xerox handout.

Stephen Budiansky, *The Covenant of the Wild: Why Animals Chose Domestication* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

R. Eschholz, *The Writer's Pocket Handbook* (Allyn and Bacon, 2000).

Adrian Franklin, *Animals and Modern Cultures: A Sociology of Human-Animal Relations in Modernity* (London: Sage, 1999).

Michael Allin, *Zarafa: A Giraffe's True Story, from Deep in Africa to the Heart of Paris* (New York: Dell, 1998).

Barbara Noske, *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1997).

James Serpell, *In the Company of Animals: A Study of Human-Animal Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

F. Spufford, *The Child That Books Built: A Life in Reading* (New York: Picador, 2002) xerox handout.

**Schedule of Lectures**

|     |    |                                                                                                      |                                   |
|-----|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Jan | 19 | Thurs Intro<br>Electronic Classroom/Reference Specialist Martha Day<br>Bailey Howe Library 6:15-8:00 |                                   |
|     | 26 | Thurs Birkerts; Budiansky Prefaces/Chap I-II                                                         |                                   |
| Feb | 2  | Thurs Spufford; Budiansky Chap III-V                                                                 |                                   |
|     | 9  | Thurs Budiansky Chap VI-VIII                                                                         | <b>SUBJECT SEARCH DUE</b>         |
|     | 16 | Thurs Franklin Chap 1-3                                                                              |                                   |
|     | 23 | Thurs Franklin Chap 4-6                                                                              |                                   |
| Mar | 2  | Thurs Franklin Chap 7-9                                                                              | <b>ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE</b> |
|     | 9  | Thurs Serpell Prefaces/Part I-II                                                                     |                                   |
|     | 16 | Thurs Serpell Part III                                                                               |                                   |
|     | 30 | Thurs Serpell Part IV                                                                                |                                   |
| Apr | 6  | Thurs Noske Intro/Chap 1-3                                                                           | <b>ROUGH DRAFT DUE</b>            |
|     | 13 | Thurs Noske Chap 4-5                                                                                 |                                   |
|     | 20 | Thurs Noske Chap 6-7/Postscript                                                                      |                                   |
|     | 27 | Thurs Allin Prologue/Chap 1-15/Epilogue                                                              |                                   |

*Final paper due:* Monday, May 1 4:00pm 31 South Prospect Street  
*There will be no exceptions*

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